

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: NARCOTICS: ROUNDUP OF BURMESE DEVELOPMENTS

REF: RANGOON 0594, MARCH 8, 1973

SUMMARY: IN APPRAISING CURRENT BURMESE NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION EFFORTS, EMBASSY NOTES THAT (A) GUB CONTINUES TO CRACK DOWN HARD ON ALL ASPECTS OF TRAFFICKING; (B) GUB DEMONSTRATES INCREASED WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE BOTH WITH THAILAND AND WITH THE UN ON NARCOTICS MATTERS; (C) ARREST OF LO HSING-HAN BY THAIS AND PROMPT EXTRADITION TO BURMA WAS MAJOR COUP; (D) OPIUM TRAFFICKING IN BURMA SHOWS A DECLINE; (E) BURMA COMMUNIST PARTY (BCP) INCURSIONS HAMPER BOTH GUB AND SMUGGLERS; (F) INSURGENCY IN OPIUM-PRODUCING AREAS REMAINS MAJOR INHIBITING FACTOR IN WAR AGAINST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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DRUGS; AND (G) PRESS AND RADIO COVERAGE OF GUB ACTIONS, SEIZURES, ARRESTS, AND PENALTIES, AND WARNINGS OF HEROIN MENACE, IS BRINGING NARCOTICS PROBLEMS TO THE PUBLIC AS NEVER BEFORE. ALL THESE DEVELOPMENTS DEMONSTRATE THAT GUB, CLEARLY AT TOP-LEVEL DIRECTION,

IS MOUNTING UNPRECEDENTED ATTACK ON NARCOTICS PROBLEM. END SUMMARY

1. IN SIX MONTHS SINCE REFTEL SENT, SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS HAVE OCCURRED WHICH, FOR MOST PART, ENCOURAGINGLY DEMONSTRATE GUB' DETERMINED EFFORTS TO CONDUCT EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN AGAINST DURG TRAFFICKING AND POINT TO EVEN MORE VIGOROUS APPROACH TO PROBLEM IN FUTURE: (A) GUB CONTINUES TO TAKE UNPRECEDENTED ACTIONS ON ALL ASPECTS OF DRUG TRAFFICKING. IN RECENT MONTHS, GUB ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES HAVE ACCOMPLISHED SUBSTANTIALLY MORE THAN IN PAST SEVERAL YEARS. GUB'S EARLIER POLICY OF CONCEALING ITS ACHIEVEMENTS HAS GIVEN WAY TO DETAILED NEWS OF ARRESTS, CONFISCATION, SEIZURES, ETC. BOTH NEWSPAPER COVERAGE AND OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION INDICATE THAT THERE HAVE BEEN LIGHTNING RAIDS -- PARTICULARLY IN THE SHAN STATE -- RESULTING IN THE DESTRUCTION OF SEVERAL REFINERIES, THE ARREST OF SEVERAL KEY TRAFFICKERS AND THE SEIZURE OF LARGE QUANTITIES OF DRUGS.

(B) ARREST AND SUBSEQUENT EXTRADITION OF LO HSING-HAN IS EASILY MOST DRAMATIC EXAMPLE OF PROGRESS IN THIS AREA, AND HAS MANY FAVORABLE REPERCUSSIONS. HOWEVER, RECENT ARREST OF ANOTHER DRUG KINGPIN, HSU CHIA-CHU, AND MANY OF HIS SUBORDINATES WILL ALSO HAVE TELLING EFFECTS ON TRAFFICKING IN GENERAL. IT IS LIKEWISE SIGNIFICANT THAT GUB CLEARLY MEANS BUSINESS IN DEALING WITH RECALCITRANT KKY LEADERS WHO REFUSED THE GUB'S OFFER IN APRIL OF INTEGRATION WITH BURMESE MILITARY UNITS WHICH WOULD HAVE ENDED THEIR TRAFFICKING IN NARCOTICS.

(C) GUB'S INCREASED WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH OTHER COUNTRIES, SPECIFICALLY THAILAND, AND WITH UN ON NARCOTICS HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED IN SEVERAL INSTANCES. VISIT OF CHAIRMAN NE WIN TO THAILAND (AND RECENT STOPOVER VISITS THERE OF BRIG TIN U), MEETING OF HIGH-LEVEL GUB-RTG COMMITTEE, WITH DRUGS REPORTED AS BEING ONE OF THE MAJOR TOPICS, AS WELL AS PROMPT EXTRADITION OF LO HSING-HAN FROM THAILAND TO BURMA, HOPEFULLY SHOW WAY FOR GREATER FUTURE OF COOPERATION, ALSO, GUB IS MOVING STEADILY (IF AT A MEASURED PACE) TOWARD DEVISING A FEASIBLE UNFDAC PROGRAM HERE. GUB HAS ALSO AGREED TO VISIT TO BURMA OF SEA UN AD HOC NARCOTICS TEAM IN OCTOBER.

(D) OPIUM TRAFFICKING HAS BEEN DECLINING STEADILY. WHILE THERE ARE SEVERAL CAUSES, PRESSURE BEING APPLIED AND RESULTANT ARRESTS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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(PARTICULARLY THAT OF LO'S AND HSU'S) AND SEIZURES HAVE PUT TRAFFICKERS ON THE RUN. DISARRAY EVIDENTLY REIGNS IN MOST AREAS, LACK OF LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITIES, HAS CAUSED LARGE NUMBERS OF TRAFFICKERS TO SCATTER AND GO FURTHER UNDERGROUND. GENERAL EFFECTS HAVE BEEN LITTLE MOVEMENT OF DRUGS, HIGH PRICES, AND SHIFT TOWARD DEALING MORE IN PRECIOUS STONES AND OTHER BLACK-MARKETABLE ITEMS THAN IN NARCOTICS. IF THIS TREND IS TO CONTINUE, HOWEVER, PRESSURE MUST BE CONTINUOUSLY APPLIED ON TRAFFICERS. (E) BURMA COMMUNIST PARTY (WHITE FLAG) BCP ACTIVITIES--OF LATE ON THE INCREASE IN NORTHEAST BURMA--HAVE HAD THEIR EFFECTS ON BOTH GUB AND TRAFFICERS. OF NECESSITY, GUB IS USING LARGE NUMBERS OF ITS MILITARY FORCES TO COPE WITH BCP, THUS DETRACTING FROM GUB'S

EFFORTS TO ERADICATE DRUG SMUGGLING. ON OTHER HAND, BECAUSE MUCH OF BCP ACTIVITY IS CENTERED IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE DOWN TO KENG TUNG AREA, SOME TRADITIONAL CARAVAN ROUTES AND WATERING HOLES HAVE BEEN INTERDICTED, PERHAPS CAUSING AS MUCH DIFFICULTY FOR SMUGGLERS AS FOR GUB. SHOULD GUB BE SUCCESSFUL IN STOPPING AND/OR FORCING BCP TO RETREAT NORTH, SOME OF UPPER CARAVAN ROUTES MAY OPEN ONCE AGAIN, BUT GUB WOULD ALSO BE IN EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF THOSE AREAS NEAR TRI-BORDER.

(F) RELATED TO (E) ABOVE IS WELL KNOWN PROBLEM THAT MOST OPIUM-GROWING AREAS ARE LOCATED WHERE GUB CONTROL HAS LONG BEEN CONTESTED. INSURGENTS ARE MUCH INVOLVED IN NARCOTICS AND INSURGENCY CONTINUES TO COMPLICATE GUB'S EFFORTS TO ERADICATE DRUG TRAFFICKING.

(G) LOCAL PRESS OF LATE HAS BEEN MOST IMPRESSIVE IN ITS SCOPE, PERCEPTION, AND OPENNESS WITH WHICH IT DISCUSSES NARCOTICS. (TWO IMPORTANT REASONS ARE DOUBTLESS (1) DRUG ABUSE HAS SPREAD INTO "BURMA PROPER" AND HAS AFFECTED MAJORITY ETHNIC GROUP OF BURMANS, WHOM GUB APPARENTLY THOUGHT WOULD REMAIN IMMUNE, (2) HEROIN HAS MADE INROADS AMONG SONS OF THE ELITE). ARTICLES APPEAR ALMOST DAILY IN BOTH BURMESE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS NOTING SEIZURES AND CONFISCATIONS OF LARGE QUANTITIES OF NARCOTICS, ARRESTS OF DEALERS AND POSSESSORS, AND WARNING OF HEROIN MENACE. THAT THE CONTROLLED PRESS IS NOW BEING DIRECTED TO DEAL OPENLY WITH A PROBLEM PREVIOUSLY KEPT IN DARK AND THAT PEOPLE ARE BEING MADE AWARE THAT THEIR GOVERNMENT IS ACTIVELY SEEKING TO ERADICATE NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING IS HIGHLY ENCOURAGING.

(H) GUB EVIDENTLY DETERMINED ALSO TO SPREAD KNOWLEDGE OF DRUGS WITHIN GUB OFFICIAL CIRCLES. MIS LAST WEEK REQUESTED LOAN FROM THE EMBASSY OF THE FILM, "THE FRENCH CONNECTION", AND KEPT FILM LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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FOR SEVEN DAYS, AND SHOWED IT FAR AND WIDE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS.

(I) GUB NOW APPEARS MORE WILLING TO LISTEN TO AND ACCEPT ADVICE OF FOREIGN EXPERTS, AS WELL AS TO ACCEPT UN FUNDING OF PROGRAMS DIRECTED AT REMOVING NARCOTICS-RELATED PROBLEMS.

2. IN SUM, NEARLY ALL THAT HAS OCCURRED IN PAST SIX MONTHS HAS BEEN ENCOURAGING; GUB HAS PROVED THAT IT CAN COOPERATE WITH OTHERS, BUT IT HAS ALSO DEMONSTRATED THAT IT CAN ACT EFFECTIVELY ON ITS OWN. THUS EMBASSY FEELS THAT GUB HAS BEGUN TO DEAL WITH THE MULTI-FACETED NARCOTICS PROBLEM IN EFFECTIVE AND COMMENDABLE MANNER. HOWEVER, MANY DIFFICULTIES REMAIN, ESPECIALLY INSURGENCY, AND GUB HAS LONG WAY YET TO GO BEFORE THESE CAN BE OVERCOME.
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